

Books in Review

Edited by Yael Maurer and Meyrav Koren-Kuik

Cityscapes of the Future: Urban Spaces in Science Fiction, Consciousness, Literature and the Arts, Volume 53, Brill Rodopi 2018, hb, 220 pp, \$96, ISBN 978-90-36130-0

Reviewed by Paul Piatkowski

Those interested in spatial theory, urban studies, and the science fiction imagination will find this collection of essays to be a worthwhile investigation into science fiction's many representations of the city. Yael Maurer and Meyrav Koren-Kuik have collected an array of interdisciplinary material for this fifty-third volume of Brill Rodopi's *Consciousness, Literature, and the Arts* series. The textual variety with which these authors grapple covers early twentieth-century to contemporary literature, Hollywood films, anime, video games, interactive websites, and more. The topics range from narrative structure and authorial technique to the ways in which future urban spaces impact social spheres as they relate to theories of network, the body, and race. Pairing urban spatiality and science fiction itself concurrently engages two highly relevant and growing fields of critical discourse and popular culture. Maurer and Koren-Kuik appropriately describe the city as more than setting, as an actant, actively reworking systems like race, class, and gender within real and imaginary networks. The essays captured in this volume articulate the intersections between these many moving parts of future cityscapes.

Maurer and Koren-Kuik divide the book's twelve essays into three distinct sections: "The City and the Body," "Cities of Estrangement," and "Cities of Imagination." These demarcations are often too broad and lead to attenuated connections among the arguments, an issue likely resulting from the

wide range of material that this volume undertakes to explore.

The first section, "The City and the Body," consists of three essays—Inbar Kaminsky's "Urban Township: The Body of the Futuristic City in Jeff VanderMeer's *Veniss Underground*," Eduardo Barros-Grela's "Post Future Cityscapes: Narratives of the Post-Human in Post Urban Environments," and Elsa Bouet's "Architecture of Punishment: Dystopian Cities Marking the Body." There is an important connection between how urban spaces influence and produce bodies, though the three essays included here only skim the potential of the topic.

In his argument, Barros-Grela pairs the anime franchise *Neon Genesis Evangelion* and Paul Auster's *Man in the Dark* in order to discuss post-human identification and "how space and spatialities perform and are performed by reconstructions of new urbanities" (28). Despite the relevant possibilities of this claim, the essay ultimately fails to fully reveal the stakes involved, while Auster sadly seems a bit of an afterthought.

Bouet's essay, conversely, is a highlight of the volume, even if the connections between the texts discussed are somewhat tenuous. Bouet counters the negative potential of urban physical and physiological imprinting with positive representations of movement, diversity, and openness. Relating the city's control over individual bodies to the city's control over its own metaphoric body, Bouet pulls

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in familiar theorists such as Michel Foucault and Henri Lefebvre for body and spatial relevance, arguing that “[t]he characters, failing to change their city, are then forced to look for new utopian avenues, fulfilled through movement, openness and exodus” (51).

In “Cities of Estrangement,” Maurer and Kerek-Kuik take existing cities and explore “their estranged forms within speculative narratives” (1). There are four essays in this section: Rosalind Fursland’s “Time Travel, Dystopia, and the Manhattan Skyscraper in George Allan England’s *The Last New Yorkers* and Murray Leinster’s ‘The Runaway Skyscraper,’” Keith Daniel Harris’ “Wires are the New Filth: The Rebirth of Dickens’ London in Cyberspace,” Henri-Simon Blanc-Hoang’s “City of Lights No More: Dystopian Paris in French Science Fiction,” and Imola Bülgözdi’s “Spatiality in the Cyber-World of William Gibson.” These four essays travel through major metropolises like Manhattan, London, and Paris. The final piece in this section, Impala Bülgözdi’s “Spatiality in the Cyber-World of William Gibson,” stands apart from the other three as Bülgözdi explores the dual virtual and lived cities (Boston, Paris, Tokyo, and London) in William Gibson’s earliest work, the *Sprawl* series, but also bridges into Gibson’s purely imaginary urban constructions.

An interesting contrast in this section comes from the source material for Rosalind Fursland’s “Time Travel, Dystopia, and the Manhattan Skyscraper in George Allan England’s *The Last New Yorker* and Murray Leinster’s ‘The Runaway Skyscraper’” and Henri-Simon Blanc-Hoang’s “City of Lights No More: Dystopian Paris in French Science Fiction.” While Fursland focuses on two early twentieth century texts that use the Met Life Tower as a time travel device, Blanc-Hoang uses very recent literature, film, a serie-MP3 (a fictional audio series similar to a podcast), and a video game

to talk about issues of immigration, technological engagement, and city management in both present-day France and future French dystopias. Both texts engage with the psychological impact of urbanity but with significantly different source materials.

In “Wires and the New Filth: The Rebirth of Dickens’ London in Cyberspace,” Keith Daniel Harris suggests Dickens’ *Bleak House* as a model of urban networks built between bodies. Harris compares this Dickensian urban model to cyberspace’s city-like networks with Masamune Shirow’s manga *Ghost in the Shell* and its anime adaptation. While Harris suggests the reader see Dickens’ city as an ecological rather than anatomical system, the author often falls back into anatomical descriptions that might be more fitting for the section “The City and the Body.” Its focus on London and the virtual networks of *Ghost in the Shell*, however, give this essay the ability to float through the entire spectrum of this volume.

The third and final section, “Cities of Imagination,” looks at completely fictional constructs of the city. The section consists of five essays: Elana Gomel’s “‘Divided Against Itself’: Dual Urban Chronotopes,” Natalie Krikowa’s “Experiencing the Cityscape and rural Landscape as ‘Citizens’ of *The Hunger Games* Storyworld,” Glen Donnar’s “‘Final Men,’ Racialized Fears & the Control of Monstrous Cityscapes in Post-Apocalyptic Hollywood Films,” Torsten Caeners “Imagination Reloaded: Transfiguring Urban Space into Virtual Space in the TV Series *Caprica*,” and “The Dame Wore Skyscrapers: The Science-fictional City as a Detective Story.” Interestingly, three of the five essays in this section focus on film and television with Natalie Krikowa’s discussion of *The Hunger Games*, Glenn Donnar’s examination of three films including the recent *I am Legend*, and Torsten Caener’s investigation of “the space of

flows” and “the space of places” in the *Battlestar Galactica* spinoff, *Caprica*.

One of the most intriguing urban investigations of the entire book, Natalie Krikowa’s “Experiencing the Cityscape and Rural Landscapes as ‘Citizens’ of *The Hunger Games* Storyworld” posits that through the transmedia manifestations of *The Hunger Games*, participants become virtual ‘citizens’ of the dystopic world of Panem. This existing and potential relationship between the story world and social reality leads to civic engagement. Krikowa argues that an engagement with parallel worlds illuminates and engages the participants and galvanizes them to take clear social action, an observation with relevance in any discussion of speculative fiction.

Race, which had been remarkably absent in most of the essays up to this point, finally appears in Glenn Donnar’s “‘Final Men,’ Racialised Fears & the Control of Monstrous Cityscapes in Post-Apocalyptic Hollywood Films.” Donnar investigates the racialization of lone men at the end of the world in three different films and argues the reaffirmation of racialized and class system hierarchies, even when other humans and the usual social systems are absent. Donnar’s focus on Hollywood film as well as the importance of racial conversation within urban studies makes this essay integral to the volume.

The section also includes “The Dame Wore Skyscrapers: The Science-fictional City as Detective Story,” in which Shawn Edrei tackles the detective plot three ways, pivoting her discussion on the way sci-fi cities have dual roles as detective stories—the literal detective story involving the protagonist tasked with solving a mystery while the reader ontologically solves the mystery of the novum—through a novel, graphic novel, and video game.

Finally, Elana Gomel takes the route of a more traditional literary analysis in “Divided Against Itself: Dual Urban Chronotopes” as she examines the dichotomy built into the urban fantasy through an array of novels including Neil Gaiman’s *Neverwhere*, China Mieville’s *The City and the City*, Conrad Williams’ *London Revenant*, and Tim Lebbon’s *Echo City*. She characterizes the cities as monstrous through their liminal “lost spaces,” deconstructing the spatial dichotomies of the novels and examining its exposed relationships. Gomel reveals a sampling of narrative techniques such as literalisation, epistemological uncertainty, and projection that are used for creating these urban fantasies.

Cityscapes of the Future: Urban Spaces in Science Fiction contributes significant arguments about the intersection between the fields of urban studies and science fiction. Perhaps most important in the volume is the wide range of source material covered, from traditional literature to technological platforms like serie-MP3 and interactive websites. At times, some of the essays get a bit lost in this range of material and would be elevated by a clearer sense of the stakes involved in their claims, but overall the innovative approaches and unique points it raises make this book an important addition to both urban and science fiction studies. In mapping these cities of the future, this volume both constructs and explores the farthest reaches of the imagination.